

Just An Occupational Hazard

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Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Family, Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Characters: Astrid, Hiccup, Stoick

Status: Completed

Published: 2014-06-09 06:21:36

Updated: 2014-07-07 23:04:32

Packaged: 2016-04-26 19:02:46

Rating: T

Chapters: 3

Words: 8,958

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Dealing with testy dragons was never really a problem. A few scratches in the right places, maybe some soothing words and a fish or two, and the reptiles would always calm down enough for him to approach safely. But not this time.

1. Chapter 1

****Well, I know the last thing I need to be doing is starting a new story, but I ****_swear_**** I'm almost done with this one. The idea has been stewing in my head for a while (and yes, it was spurred from the events of "Fixing Things") and I originally intended for it to be a one-shot, but then it started getting a bit long so I decided to divide it up. I'm anticipating it to be about three parts - maybe even two. We'll see.****

****NOTE: As usual, I am not quite sure how strong of a warning to put on this, but please be aware of the fact that there are brief but somewhat graphic descriptions of injury. So if you're bothered by gore ****_at all, _****proceed with caution. ****

* * *

><p>Hiccup was having a hard time. And that was highly unusual. But, for the life of him, he could not figure out why this particular Monstrous Nightmare was being so difficult. Dealing with testy dragons was never really a problem. A few scratches in the right places, maybe some soothing words and a fish or two, and the reptiles would always calm down enough for him to approach safely.

But not this time.

He'd been in the arena with this one for almost half an hour after it had chased him in from the forest (subsequent to, he'd admit, a stupid decision to approach it from behind) and it was _still_ going

after him with a vengeful tenacity that, in his opinion, went further than a mere irritation at being touched.

But, as always, his inherited Viking stubbornness drove him to keep at it. He was going to tame this Nightmare, no matter how many times he had to dive to the ground to avoid being scorched by a tongue of hot red flame.

It was doing a number on his chest, though.

Another "oof!" escaped his mouth as he dropped onto his stomach in the dirt beneath the fire's heat and proceeded to roll into a crouch in order to dodge a powerful snap of the beast's jaws.

"Ooh, he almost got you that time, Hiccup!" came a call from the sidelines.

Snotlout. Brilliant. As if he wasn't already humiliated enough by his inability to quell the dragon's nasty temper without an audience. A quick glance to the top of the arena revealed a small crowd consisting of his friends, save for Fishlegs. Toothless's obsidian head was visible behind the group.

He groaned in annoyance. "You know, you could come and help me instead of just standing there and giving useless and unwanted commentary."

"And get in there with that dragon? No thanks!" came the reply. "Besides, you're the Dragon Conqueror. One little Nightmare shouldn't be a problem."

"If you haven't noticed, it's not exactly little," Hiccup retorted as he ducked another burst of fire. He didn't like having to ask for help, but the dragon was really proving to be a handful.

What had gotten it so worked up?

"Hiccup, maybe you should let this one go," Astrid's voice shouted. "It seems pretty wild."

As usual, she was probably right. It had been chasing him around for ages and he was really starting to get tired. But at the same time, it was so rare for a dragon to present such a challenge. Two years of training dragons had ensured his mastery of the art, so it seemed almost like child's play now. And Nightmares were trainable. Why would this one be any different? No, he needed to proveâ€"to himself mostlyâ€"that this one was no different. Just difficult. And stubborn. And angry.

"Come on, if anyone can train it, Hiccup can," Tuffnut commented. Then, a little less surely, "Right?"

"Right," Hiccup affirmed. He was determined now. For the sake of his reputation, this dragon would be tame by the end of the afternoon.

His breathing was labored and sweat trickled down from his temple as he reached out a hand toward the Nightmare's snout for the umpteenth time. And, for the umpteenth time, its eyes narrowed with a threatening hiss right before another jet of flame streamed from its

throat.

Hiccup jerked back just a second too late, his movements slowed by weariness. The fire seared the front of the loose white tunic he wore, along with a good bit of his upper left arm. An unwarranted cry of pain escaped him before he could stop it.

"Hiccup!" Astrid yelled.

"Fine, I'm fine!" he answered even as his clothes smoldered and his arm throbbed with scorching pain. It was hard to move it. Oh, this was just what he needed. An overly aggressive dragon and only one arm functioning correctly.

"You should get out of there!" the blonde Viking called. "That thing is dangerous! Just come back tomorrow and try again after its calmed down."

"Just give me one more second!"

He didn't exactly know what good one more second would do, but it seemed cowardly to give up now. And he'd probably spend the rest of his life trying to prove he wasn't a coward. Also, he really didn't want a Nightmare, of all dragons, to go down in history as the one Hiccup the Dragon Trainer couldn't train.

The smell of burnt hair and skin reached his nose as he backed up slowly, uttering calm, placating words to the angry reptile that was currently glaring at him through pupils narrowed to slits, obviously preparing to execute his murder. His left arm hung limply against his side while his right was extended toward the beast in mollification.

"It's okay, it's all right," he murmured. "Something's got you pretty upset, huh? Probably my faultâ€¦"

The Nightmare slowly took a few more menacing steps toward him. He continued to back up.

"But it's okay now. I'm not going to hurt you. And you already got the hurting me part out of the way, so why don't we be friends?"

"You're gonna get torched!"

Hiccup gritted his teeth. "Thank you, Snotlout."

Snotlout said something else he couldn't quite make out, but it was something along the lines of, "Hey, I aim to serve."

Hiccup just rolled his eyes and turned all of his attention to the dragon. "Just you and me here, pal," he said softly. "Why don't you calm down?"

Maybe it was his imagination, but the Nightmare's eyes seemed to round out just the slightest bit. It halted in its encroachment, mere feet from Hiccup, and tilted its head a fraction of a degree.

"That's it," the Viking boy cooed. "That's it. Just take it

easy."

His aching chest heaved as he tried to slow his breathing and the arm he held out trembled slightly with strain. It was obvious he wouldn't be able to keep this up for much longer. His limbs felt weak and wobbly from running around so much, and the burns on his arm had gone numb—which, he knew from experience, was not good. He could feel his hair clinging to his sweat-soaked face. He must look like a wreck.

Best to get this over with as soon as possible.

Hand still extended, he turned his head away respectfully and reached forward just the slightest bit. This was it—he'd done it. It had to submit now.

Finally, his palm met the Nightmare's rough scales. A breath of relief released itself from his lungs—

—until he heard the low growl building in the reptile's throat.

He looked up just in time to jerk his hand away when razor sharp teeth clamped down again with an unreal strength, whatever trust or tranquility that might've been instilled in the dragon instantly vanishing.

With a cry of alarm, Hiccup scrambled backward. Long, wicked claws suddenly slashed out and an enraged, deafening roar filled the air. Hiccup's ears buzzed as it reverberated inside his head, disorienting him.

And that was the moment he knew he had to get out.

This dragon was crazy. And beyond saving.

It was also the same moment that his back hit the wall of the arena. Green eyes widened with fear at the dawning realization of his predicament. A stone wall in one direction—and a feral, out-of-control monster in the other. He'd been wrong to attempt this. Suddenly he was thrown back into his fifteen-year-old body on the first day of dragon training, staring up into the gaping maw of a Gronckle and a lava blast building up to incinerate his prone form. Only Gobber wasn't here to hook this dragon in the mouth.

It was up to Hiccup this time.

The Nightmare reared up in what looked very much like blind, mindless rage, its unearthly shrieking never stopping, and slashed downward again.

Hiccup's sharp eye quickly pinpointed the opening beneath the dragon's belly and he dove for it.

He cleared it just in time, judging from the rush of air that whizzed past his back. His body hit the ground and he somersaulted forward, escaping the corner he'd accidentally backed into. The gate to the arena was suddenly in his line of sight. He wasted no time in sprinting for it.

He'd crossed almost half the distance before he let himself feel

relief again. So maybe he had failed to tame this dragon, but it certainly wasn't something worth risking his life over. The sound of his friends shouting at him registered vaguely in the back of his mind, but all he was focused on was getting _out_ of there.

That's when a set of razor-edged claws suddenly raked across his back.

His vision went white.

The breath was sucked from his lungs as his body collapsed unceremoniously onto the ground. Everything in him wanted to scream. His mouth was open, but no sound came from it. There was only the sound of ripping fabric and flesh, the slicing of skin and muscle, the immediate flow of blood plastering cloth to his back.

And the pain.

It hit him about two seconds after he fell.

And then it exploded like Zippieback gas all throughout his torso, leaving him gasping desperately and clawing at the ground.

Gods, there was so much pain.

A face full of dirt and gravel, hands gripping at stone, teeth clenching in agony, moans elicited from unbearable, stabbing torment. Excruciating shocks radiated through his torso over and over. This was it. He was going to die. He was going to be killed training a dragon—the only thing he was good at doing. Seemed appropriate.

The pain was so blinding that he wasn't aware of much else, but the presence of the Nightmare looming over him registered well enough. He squeezed his eyes shut as he waited for his inevitable fiery death. Maybe he should try to get up and run again, but an experimental shift of limbs ensured that that was definitely _not_ going to happen. Agony pressed on his back like a two-ton boulder, pinning him to the ground with knives. It was hard to breathe. The smallest inflation of his lungs might as well have been someone taking a hatchet to his back. Perhaps death was better.

But the attack he was waiting to deliver it never came. Through the ringing in his ears, he heard another furious roar from the Nightmare, but this time it wasn't directly on top of him. It sounded further away, toward the back of the arena. And he could've been mistaken, but he thought he heard another dragon's roar joining the Nightmare's. It sounded like the shriek of a Night Fury. He didn't have the strength to lift his head to see for sure. Warning bells went off in the back of his mind, insisting that he should be concerned about that, but it was becoming so hard to think straight that he couldn't remember _why_ it would be important.

His vision suddenly faded a bit, blackness creeping in around the edges. Whether the cause was pain or blood loss or oxygen deprivation, Hiccup couldn't tell. But no matter the cause, unconsciousness would be welcome if it relieved him from the merciless spasms of pain tearing through his back.

The sound of approaching footsteps pounding on the dirt reached his

ears, but he still couldn't lift his head. All he could do was struggle to breathe in what little air he could manage and endure the shallow, pained gasps racking his chest like hiccups. His fingers dug into the ground, dirt collecting under his fingernails, and the blackness claimed a little bit more of his sight.

"Hiccup!"

Was that Astrid?

"Oh, gods!"

Yeah, that was Astrid.

"Are you all right?" she demanded, her voice overhead and heightened in evident alarm. He didn't know if he'd ever heard such a frightened tone come from her.

He was unable to answer. Actually, his silence was probably a better and more effective reply than any he could've verbalized. He was aware of Astrid kneeling beside him and bending over to get a good look at his injuries. The slight sensation of her fingers gingerly touching his shoulder blade sent a twinge of pain shuddering through his muscles and he hissed through gritted teeth.

"Oh, my gods," she breathed, seemingly at a loss for words for the first time in her life. "Hiccup? Hiccup, listen to me. You're going to be okay. Just hold on, all right? Everything's gonna be okay."

He moaned miserably in response.

Then Astrid was yelling ardently at Ruffnut to get over there _right that second_ before turning her attention back to him, gently placing a hand on the side of his face and begging him to keep his eyes open.

Hiccup coughed, the jolt like murder to his body. "Whâ€"what happened t'â€"

"The Nightmare? Don't worry, we got it taken care of." Her fingers gently brushed back his dampened chestnut bangs. "Now be quiet. Try not to move."

Seconds later, another pair of feetâ€"presumably Ruffnut'sâ€"was heard running in their direction. The closer the footfalls grew, the slower they became. Upon reaching the spot that Hiccup laid, they stopped completely.

"Whoa," the girl uttered softly.

Maybe it was just the blood singing in his ears, but Hiccup could've sworn there was actual uneaseâ€"rather than aweâ€"in her voice at what must be a pretty impressive mess the beast had made of his back. He didn't need to see it in order to know that sizable chunks of muscle and flesh had been torn from his torso.

"Help me stop the bleeding," Astrid ordered, but it sounded more like a desperate plea than her usually strict commands.

The next moment, his shirt was being stripped away by quick hands. No

words were exchanged, but that was just as well. Hiccup's head was beginning to pound.

The silence vanished, however, when the hands began pressing wads of cloth to his back to staunch what had to be a heavy blood flow. He couldn't stop himself from screaming in pain, no matter how hard he tried to keep quiet.

_Stop. Stop! Stop it, please! THAT HURTS! _he wanted to shout, but his lips refused to cooperate.

"It's all right," Astrid murmured, breathless voice belying her words. "It's all right, just hang on. Your dad's coming."

He didn't even have sense enough left to feel embarrassed at the prospect of his father seeing him like this. His consciousness was fading rapidly with each round of pressure applied to his wounds, and consequently, the renewed waves of agony. Soon the screaming died down to long, thin whines, and then to nothing at all because it hurt too much.

Time was hard to keep track of while lying in the dirt and enduring the stinging, fiery torment of having cloth pressed to open gashes, so he didn't bother with it. But it still felt like an eternity before a mass of voices became audible in the direction of the arena's gate. Stoick's was among them, but Hiccup didn't even care. He just wanted to pass out already.

As the voices approached, he noticed they sounded alarmed and panicked, but their words were muffled behind the pounding in his ears. More pressure on his back caused the arena to blur in front of his eyes. It didn't take long at all before the blackness finally took his vision and his mind.

2. Chapter 2

Waking up was a slow and rather unpleasant process. There were several times—“which he would only have the vaguest memory of later on—“when Hiccup would regain _just_ enough consciousness to feel the tremendous and ever-present pain jolting through his torso, and nothing else. Then there was heat and haze, fire and ash, fragments of dreams and shifting images that might've been real and might've been figments of his imagination. It was hard to distinguish what was real and what wasn't. Phantom hands, whose owners were unknown, would ghost over his forehead and force things into his mouth and do things to his back that made him want to scream. He might have actually screamed—“there was no way to know for sure. But then he would sink back into the comfort of oblivion and his misery was forgotten until the next bout of wakefulness.

How long that cycle lasted, he didn't know. Could've been weeks, and it could've only been a few days. Technically it could've been a few _hours_, _for all Hiccup knew. But eventually, the fog that blurred the line between the real world and his own mind began to clear out of his head and his senses started working like they were supposed to again.

The world came into focus gradually. First there was the feeling of his face pressed against a pillow. Then it was the rest of his body

lying stomach-down on the familiar planks of his own bed, covered in sweat. Next came the dryness in his mouth, and the thirst that went along with it.

Lastly was the pain. Part of him knew that it would kick in some time, seeing as how it had been the only constant throughout this weird phase of floating between dreams and reality. It stuck with him closely whenever a shred of consciousness grabbed hold of his mind, so it just made sense that it came back with a vengeance as soon as he tried to move. A loud groan slid past his lips when he shifted an arm to try and push himself up, only to have his efforts rewarded by a burning ache that lanced through his back and left him breathless. Upon further examination of himself, he realized that he was sore all over. Everything hurt. Thor, what had happened to him?

Oh, right. The Nightmare.

When that memory came back, he groaned miserably into his pillow. How humiliating. And his friends had witnessed the whole thing. Just great.

He lied there for a few more minutes, wishing the memories away, before he decided he really needed something to drink. And that posed quite the problem, seeing as how his last attempt to get up had ended as soon as he'd moved an arm.

Hiccup raised his head, wincing at the twinge of pain it caused, and looked around as much as he could to take in his surroundings. His bed had once again been moved down from his loft and was positioned next to the firepot, as if whoever had been watching over him was trying to keep him warm. He was shirtless, but that wasn't a surprise. A plethora of bandages was wrapped tightly around his entire torso, from the base of his hips to the tops of his shoulders. His left arm was bandaged to the elbow as well. When he turned his head to the right, he saw a chair next to the bed with a water basin resting in its seat. The sight of it just made him thirstier.

"Hello?" he called, cringing at the weakness in his voice. It seemed raspy with disuse, suggesting he'd been out longer than a few hours.

After listening for a bit and receiving no answer, he determined that there was no one in the house. Which was a little strange. He at least expected Toothless to be there with him.

Looked like he'd have to get a drink himself. Gritting his teeth, he planted his hands on the bed and bit down on a curse when pain jolted through his burnt shoulder. But he kept going, fighting the heaviness and the ache in his limbs. After a slow and painstaking struggle, he finally made it to a sitting position.

Another bolt of pain caused him to double over without thinkingâ€”and that time he did curse. He could've sworn someone had taken a hot rod to his back. The pain was so excruciating that tears flooded into his eyes without warning. And the sound that came out of his mouth was one he was infinitely glad no one was around to hear. He sat for a while with his head in his hands and tried to get a handle on the pain by forcing himself to breathe steadily. In through the nose, out through the mouth.

When it had died down to a manageable level, he grabbed hold of the wooden bedpost and _oh so_ carefully hoisted himself up to his feet, absently wishing Toothless was there to offer silent support as he had the last time Hiccup had woken up in his house after an indefinite period of unconsciousness. He certainly could've used it at the moment. His muscles shuddered and his legs wobbled dangerously even as the majority of his weight leaned on the post. His head spun with dizziness.

He took his first step at the same time the front door opened. Whoever entered was just in time to see him lose his balance and crumple onto the floor. His side slammed into the wooden boards with a heavy thud and this time he didn't even try to hold back a loud, raw shout of agony. Black spots danced before his eyes, the pain so intense he couldn't think straight.

"Hiccup!"

A flurry of footsteps and hands were suddenly on his arm and face, frantically searching him over for damage. Astrid's hands. His eyes were screwed shut in anguish, but he easily recognized her slender, calloused fingers.

"Hiccup, what are you _doing_?" she demanded angrily. She positioned herself underneath his right arm, wrapping it firmly around her shoulders and helping him to sit up by supporting his chest, all while carefully avoiding his back. "Are you insane?"

Probably. "Iâ€"I jus'â€" He gasped and pitched forward as spasms of pain rippled through his back, fingers digging tightly into Astrid's shoulders. The room swayed sickeningly around him but he stubbornly clung to consciousness. "_Almighty_ _Thor_â€" His voice came out as a harsh, breathless whisper through clenched teeth.

"Shh," she hushed, pulling him closer against her. "It's okay. Breathe."

Following that command was harder than it should've been. He sat for what seemed like a long time with his head resting on her shoulder, pushing and pulling air in and out of his lungs rhythmically while her fingers brushed calmly through his hair.

Eventually the pain began to recede again and his grip on her loosened. "Sorry," he muttered, ashamed of the way his voice cracked.

She didn't seem to notice. "Are you okay?"

A huff of a laugh. "That's kind of a relative question."

Astrid pulled back and craned her neck to look into his face. Her expression informed that she was unimpressed with his answer. "Care to explain why you thought it was a good idea to get out of bed?"

His attention was once again drawn to the way his tongue was sitting like a wad of cotton in his mouth. As if to put a finer point on it, a dry cough tore from his throat. "I needed some water."

Astrid's blue eyes rounded out in understanding and her features softened a degree. "Oh. Wellâ€"I can get it for you. But let's get you back to bed first."

The prospect of getting up was definitely not appealing, but sitting upâ€"even when he was leaning on Astridâ€"was starting to cause aches to shoot through his torso. So, reluctantly, he nodded.

Astrid got to her knees and tucked herself up against his right side. Her arm began to move around to his back, but then stopped abruptly and took hold of his bicep instead. She was obviously doing her best not to jar his injuries, but it was pretty much unavoidable. Hiccup knew that, so he was as braced as he could've been when her other hand wandered too close to his burns and he managed to bite his lip instead of complaining audibly. They stood together slowly. The muscles in Hiccup's back strained and stretched, pulling ruthlessly at his wounds, and eventually he was unable to stop a low groan from exiting his mouth. It was just such an awful sensation. He had to lean on Astrid more heavily than he cared to admit as she began to lead him back to bed.

She stopped when his breath started coming in sharp gasps. "You okay?"

Hiccup nodded, not trusting himself to speak. It was embarrassing to be so weak, but it hurt so much that he didn't even try to put up a strong front. Astrid would probably see straight through it, anyway.

She helped him shuffle slowly across the few feet to the bed, and kept a firm hold on his arms as he sat down. By the time he was once again lying flat on his stomach, a sheen of sweat covered his face and his body was throbbing viciously.

"Okay, wait just a second while I get some water," Astrid said. "And I'm gonna find your dad and Toothless too. They'll want to know you're awake."

Hiccup gave a grunt of acknowledgement and let his eyes close. Gods, he was exhausted. What had happened in the time between when he'd passed out in the arena and now? It was all a blurâ€"a muddy, surreal blur. Well, one thing was for sure: he wouldn't hear the end of it from Astrid after this. And probably Snotlout as well. Stoick would definitely have a word or two to say to him too.

He replayed the accident over and over in his mind, trying to pinpoint what exactly had made everything go so sourly. He hadn't done anything he usually didn't when taming a dragon. Sure, he'd come across rogue dragons before that were obviously not trainable, butâ€"but this was a Nightmare. It wasn't a Scauldron or a Whispering Death or any of the especially dangerous species. Maybe that was why he'd been so intent on taming it.

In the end, though, he supposed it would have to suffice to say it was just too wild.

And that was puzzling.

Hiccup surely never thought a Nightmare would be the dragon to give

him his first really severe injury while training. He'd been injured by dragons before, obviously, but since the incident with the Red Death the worst dragon-related wounds he'd received were a few second-degree burns. Nothing to incapacitate him like this. Though in retrospect, this was probably inevitable.

Still didn't make it any less humiliating.

Nearly ten minutes passed before the front door opened again and Astrid entered with a bucket, which she hauled over and set down by the bed. Then, without a word, she ladled out some water and held it to Hiccup's lips.

He couldn't remember feeling so thirsty in his entire life. It was an awkward position to drink from, but he hardly even noticed. Astrid displayed a patience he didn't know she was capable of while he gulped down spoonful after spoonful.

"Just so you know," she said while he drank. "You have very strict instructions not to get out of bed. Not to move much, actually. The healer said if you tear any stitches she'll bludgeon you in the head."

"Yes, I'm sure that would be extremely helpful, considering the circumstances," he droned. Although, another phase of unconsciousness didn't sound entirely unappealing at the moment. His back still ached terribly—a type of ache that meant to stick around for some time.

Astrid only shook her head and held the ladle up for him again. By the time he'd finally sated his thirst, he'd managed to spill more water than he actually drank.

"This is so embarrassing," he muttered, wiping his dripping chin with the back of his hand.

Astrid laughed softly. "Yeah, kind of. But you can't do it yourself, so someone has to help. Might as well be me."

"Uh huh. Thanks." He was equally as grateful for her help as he was mortified by it.

"You're welcome," she returned a bit smugly. Her piercing blue eyes lingered on his face for a moment too long, and after a few seconds of silence her expression sobered. She reached out a hand and placed it gently on his forehead. "How are you feeling?"

He gave the best shrug he could manage. "Tired. Sore. Probably what you'd expect."

As he watched for her reaction, he noticed something strange. Astrid wasn't really one to worry too much, especially about injuries. She was the "rub some dirt on it and you'll be fine" type, as were most Vikings. But now there was a depth of worry in her eyes that Hiccup had never seen before. They watched him closely, almost as if she was afraid he might keel over at any second.

It was making him uncomfortable.

"Astrid—" he started a little uncertainly. "What happened? How long

was I out?"

The blonde girl sighed and dropped the ladle back in the bucket. "You've been out for almost a week."

"A _week_?"

A grim nod. "Itâ€|wasn't pretty. You hardly had any skin left on your back, and the gashes were deep. It took the healer forever to stitch you up. She said it was a miracle your spine didn't take any damage."

Hiccup watched her face grow bleaker, gaze falling to her lap.

"Things were looking pretty bad for a while. You lost so much blood, we thoughtâ€|" She shook her head. "Everyone was really worried. And then there was an infectionâ€|not a bad one, but the healer was afraid you wouldn't be able to fight it off." Astrid studied her hands for a moment before looking back up at Hiccup with a forced smile. "But I guess you're getting better now."

Just hearing about his wounds made them ache all over again, but he only nodded thoughtfully. "What happened with the Nightmare?"

"Well, after youâ€|you know, got hurt, all of us immediately ran into the arena. Toothless got there first." She gave a quiet laugh. "I swear I thought he was gonna kill that Nightmare until Snotlout went over. He and Tuffnut and Toothless somehow got it into one of the holding cages, and then we sent Tuffnut to get your dad and Gobber."

Hiccup gave an indignant grunt. "So how mad is my dad?"

Astrid's eyebrows furrowed. She almost looked offended. "He's not mad, Hiccup. Why would you think that?"

He blinked. "He's always mad when I do something like this."

"Then you must not know him as well as you think." She frowned and sat back. "Hiccup, he's been worried out of his _mind_. We all have. You should've seen him when he got to the arena. I don't think anyone's seen him look so scared since two years ago."

The battle with the Red Death. Hiccup's mouth set into a grim line. He knew Stoick would be worried, of course, but now that he was awake and apparently on the mend, he just figured he'd get an angry earful from the man about how dragons were still _dragons_ and he should know better than to do something so stupid.

"He's on his way here," Astrid added. "With Toothless."

"Yeah, where has Toothless been?" He probably sounded a little too eager to move on to a new topic.

The Viking girl laughed lightly. "He hasn't been allowed in the room with you without supervision. Stoick was scared he'd get a little too excited and jump on you or something, so Fishlegs has been dragon-sitting."

Hiccup smiled. "That was actually probably a smart call on his part."

Astrid returned the smile, eyes shining. "It's great that you're awake, Hiccup. It's been a, uh, tough week."

He could probably count on one hand the number of times he'd seen Astrid truly shaken by something, so to hear the weariness and genuine relief in her voice took him by surprise. Had she really been so worried about him?

"I'm sorry," he murmured, green eyes boring directly into hers. "I didn't think this was going to happen."

"I know. But as much time as you spend around dragons, it was bound to happen at some point." A slender finger flicked him in the forehead. "This is why you should listen to me, you big goof."

Hiccup laughed. "You're right, you're right."

The girl sat back in the chair, folding her arms over her chest. "I always am."

* * *

><p>Sorry for the awkward ending. Like I said, I didn't originally write this to be in separate parts. But, nevertheless, I hope you enjoyed this installment (all you horrible people who probably love injured Hiccup as much as I do). I'm thinking there'll be one last part to this - which, miraculously, I have already written a good bit of. Thanks so much to everyone who has read and reviewed! You all give me life as a writer.

**Drop a review for this chapter if you have time? It means an awful lot to me, and nothing gives me more joy than hearing your thoughts on the story! Thanks again so much! **

In other news, I'M GOING TO SEE HTTYD 2 TODAY. SEE YOU GUYS ON THE OTHER SIDE.

3. Chapter 3

The door opened before Hiccup could get out a witty response and the Hooligan chief's head appeared behind it.

"Hiccup?" His voice sounded oddly hopeful.

The boy craned his head as best he could to see the doorway. "Hey, Dad."

The wave of self-consciousness that seized Hiccup suddenly was a bit unexpected. Stoick was well past thinking him weak and useless, but the need to prove to his father that he wasn't inadequate, that he could be as tough as Vikings with moreâ€|well, _conventional_ statures, hadn't quite gone away. And being in this state of vulnerability and impairment in front of himâ€|in front of _anyone_, really, but especially himâ€|was just humiliating.

But as Stoick came in and approached the bed, there was no trace of condescendence or disapproval in his expression. There was only concern. And_ that_ was something Hiccup had seen maybe once before in his life.

"Hey, Son," the man said in an unusually gentle tone as he dragged over a heavy wooden chair and sat down next to Astrid. "How're you feelin'?"

"Okay I guess," was Hiccup's only answer.

Unsurprisingly, Stoick frowned at him in obvious skepticism and then raised an inquisitive eyebrow in the blonde's direction.

"He still has a smidge of a fever," she told the chief, speaking as if Hiccup wasn't even in the room. "And he's been in a pretty good amount of pain, but considering the circumstances I think he's doing all right."

That seemed to satisfy Stoick. He gave a nod. "Well, that's good to hear."

Hiccup had to consciously stop himself from making a face. If his father considered the fact that he was feverish and in pain to be _good news_, he must've had an even rougher time of it than Astrid had let on. He was, however, infinitely thankful that she hadn't mentioned his little mishap earlier.

A few moments passed in which no one spoke. Stoick's gaze lingered on him, observant and intent, and Hiccup began to squirm under it. He cleared his throat as things became unbearably awkward. "Where's Toothless?"

"Outside." The chief's eyes finally moved to the door. "Didn't want to let him in until I saw how you were doin.' I'll get 'im."

He began to rise from the chair, but Astrid hopped up to stop him. "It's okay, sir. I'll get him. And I'll get the healer too, if you want."

"Thank you, Astrid," Stoick answered with a nod.

He waited until she'd disappeared behind the door before turning to Hiccup again with a disturbingly knowing expression. "You're not feeling well, are you?"

Hiccup blinked in surprise. Sometimes he was still caught off-guard by how well his father could read him. The way the question was phrased made it abundantly clear that it was too late to put up any kind of front. Not that he wanted to, really. His reluctance had more to do with the fact that he was just _frustrated_ with the entire situation. But with Astrid out of the room, he decided to be transparent with his father. "Aaahâ€|no, not really."

Stoick had apparently been expecting that answer. "You shouldn't be. Those wounds are impressive." His countenance assumed a more sobered look. "Astrid told me what happened. That she'd warned you to leave that Nightmare alone but you wouldn't listen."

Aaand there it was. Hiccup knew it would come at some point during

this conversationâ€|though it sounded a lot less angry than he thought it would. "Yeah, well, sure is a mystery where I get _that_ from."

"Hiccup," Stoick asserted. "I don't think you realize how serious this is. We came dangerously close toâ€|to losing you. Because you were being stubborn. And I realize that stubbornness can be a good trait sometimes, but, Hiccupâ€|there's a fine line between stubbornness and stupidity. And you crossed it."

"Butâ€|"

Stoick held up a halting hand. "You have to learn to discern between the two. I know you like pushing limits with dragons, but you have to know when enough is enough."

Hiccup bit down on a retort. In retrospect, the stupidity of his actions became evident even to him, but at the time it hadn't seemed foolish. It was just routine, something he'd done many times. This time justâ€|happened to have a worse outcome than usual.

As if reading his thoughts, his father shook his head, beard swaying slightly with the motion, and said, "Really, it's a wonder you haven't been killed already. You _have_ to be more careful, Son."

"I will." His eyes were trained on a knot in the wooden floorboards. He had never been particularly adept at judging when his actions crossed over from bravery to stupidity, but if this was how Stoick was going to react when his reckless decisions caused him harm, he would do his best to get better at it.

Usually the man came off as angry and irritated whenever Hiccup did something stupid, which was probably why he kept on doing it. Not to spite his father, necessarily, but merely because he was used to Stoick's anger. It was nothing new, and nothing particularly threatening. Stoick was angry a lot. That was just a commonly known fact. Hiccup had learned to roll his eyes and ignore the tirades.

He was aware of the fact that Stoick cared a lot for him, of course. Heck, the man's overprotectiveness almost _smothered_ him at times. But usually, whenever Hiccup crossed a boundary, his dad would only scold him over and overâ€|something the young Viking had never reacted to _spectacularly_ well.

This, however, was something completely different.

There was no anger, no rebuke, no hostility whatsoever in Stoick's visage. But Hiccup almost wished there was. He knew how to deal with that. Notâ€|_this_. Not the soft look of weariness and solicitude the fierce chief was aiming at him. Not the evidence of sleepless nights and constant vigils.

The concern in his father's eyes, the lines of worry etched into his face, and hints of what might be actual _fear_ in his voice did not sit well with Hiccup. Stoick was a rockâ€|unmovable, strong, _constant_â€|and seeing any wavering emotion in him perturbed the boy more than he'd like to admit. He wasn't supposed to look so worn-down and scared. _Fear_ did not become Stoick the Vast. And Hiccup did not want to be the cause of it.

"I'm sorry, Dad. Really." The words were out of his mouth before he'd fully thought through them. But he did mean them. "I didn'tâ€"I didn't mean for things to get so out-of-hand, I justâ€" A huff of air left him. "I'll do better."

He wanted to say more, but a wave of drowsiness suddenly washed over him. Eyelids fluttered as it became a bit of a struggle not to succumb to immediate sleepâ€"perhaps the effects of the leftover fever or blood loss.

Stoick's meaty hand reached out to gently ruffle his hair. "It's all right, Son. I'm just glad you're okay. But we're going to discuss this further when you're better."

Hiccup offered a mere huff in the way of acknowledgement and opened his mouth to give some halfhearted sarcastic reply when the door burst opened and one overly excited Night Fury came bounding inside.

The sleepiness abated just a bit at the sight of his best friend. "Toothless! Hey, bud."

He started to reach out for the dragon, but in the blink of an eye Stoick had risen from his chair and positioned himself between Hiccup and Toothless, a hand reached out to stop the reptile in his enthusiastic approach.

"Whoa, slow down there," he said, sidestepping to make sure Toothless didn't slip around him.

Hiccup's brow furrowed. "Dad, what are you doing?"

"I'm not going to risk him accidentally hurting you."

His eyes rolled subtly. "He's fine, Dad. Let him through."

Stoick hesitated for another moment, evidently thinking it over, before he finally stepped aside. "All right. But you be careful, dragon."

Toothless seemed to get the message. He calmed significantly and slinked over to Hiccup's bedside in an almost tentative manner, head reaching out to sniff at his rider's bandages before looking right at Hiccup and uttering a low, somber warble.

"Hey there, bud." The boy extended a hand to rest on the dragon's nose, wincing a bit at the twinge of pain the movement caused. Toothless crooned again, nuzzling into his palm. "'S good to see you."

His fingers scratched at obsidian scales, and while it was with less vigor than usual, Toothless seemed to appreciate it just as much and dragged his tongue against the young man's face, sending a clear message. It's good to see you too.

"Toothless, gross," Hiccup laughed, wiping the saliva away. It was amazing how the dragon was able to lift his spirits just by being there. The constant pain lingering in his back was almost forgotten.

Almost.

The dragon and rider didn't get to enjoy the reunion much longer, because soon Astrid was entering the house again with the village healer in tow. Hiccup had never liked that woman very much. She was much like Gothi, but younger. And she spoke.

His eyelids fluttered drowsily again as his father and Astrid spoke to her, probably bringing her up-to-date about his condition. The flooring creaked as she made her way over to his bedside, but he didn't turn his head even when he felt her removing the bandages. She went about a routine checkup, observing the wounds, mixing a poultice, preparing to change the bandages, and so on. Her rough palm came to cradle his forehead, checking for fever, and then her face was in his face, pulling at his eyelids and prying open his mouth. Though what she could possibly find out from looking in there, he didn't know. But he supposed that was why he wasn't a healer.

He was only half awake for the entire routine. If it weren't for all the prodding and questioning, he would've definitely been asleep in seconds. It took all his energy and focus to answer the woman's questions coherently, and even then she often had to repeat them.

In fact, she might've been asking one at that very moment. He was too groggy to know for sure.

"Hiccup?" Stoick asked as if in response to his thoughts, voice suddenly right beside his head.

"Mmm," Hiccup murmured.

"She wants to know how your pain is."

Seemed like a stupid thing to ask. "It's pain. It hurts."

He could almost feel Stoick rolling his eyes.

After that, the healer went about a simpler way of gauging his pain by poking and pressing on him and measuring his discomfort by the intensity of his cries. The tactic effectively woke him up a bit. Toothless snuffled at his hair in concern every time he whimpered.

The healer also ended up having to redo a few stitches that had been mysteriously ruined. Hiccup wanted to beg to be knocked out before the procedure, but also didn't want to sound like a wimp. It was one of those instances when he asked himself what would my father do? and made his decision based on the answer.

He was given a cloth to place between his teeth. Stoick and Astrid flanked him on either side while Toothless remained by his head.

When the healer began pushing and pulling needle and thread through already agitated skin, it was all he could do to choke back a scream. Teeth sunk into the cloth and eyes squeezed shut. The sensation of it was worse than the actual pain, although there was plenty of that too. It wasn't until he felt Toothless's tongue on his cheek that he realized he was groaning. Astrid's hand was resting atop his fist one and Stoick occasionally patted his arm for comfort.

It seemed an eternity passed before it was over with. The healer finished by covering the wounds in poultice and wrapping them with fresh bandages, and finally left the house with stern instructions to stay in bed until she gave the okay and to refrain from any strenuous activity.

"Like that'll happen," Astrid muttered under her breath. Hiccup wasn't sure if she had meant for him to hear it or not.

He had absolutely no intention of getting up again any time soon, though, and spent the next few days sleeping and regaining strength. But by the fourth day, he had come down with a rather severe case of cabin fever and was driving Stoick mad with incessant complaining because he was so bored and was constantly asking to get out of bed. The answer was always no, but it didn't seem to quite get through the boy's skull. By day five, he was concocting a plan to sneak out unnoticed to go for one quick flightâ€”for Toothless's sake, of course, since the dragon had become just as restless without his rider. Astrid had been flying him in Hiccup's stead, but Hiccup knew it wasn't the same. Toothless needed him.

That was why he was currently struggling to pull on a shirt. The task was a challenge thanks to the fact that his back, though considerably better, still ached pretty fiercely. The pain was bearable though, and that was good enough. Once he'd gotten the loose tunic situated crookedly on himself, he made his way furtively to the front door even though the house was empty and Stoick wouldn't be back soon. It was midday, so avoiding any attention would be tricky, but Toothless was waiting on the far side of the shed where Hiccup kept his saddle. If he could make it to the shed without being seen, they'd be able to get away safely. A feeling of triumph was already beginning to build in his chest when he opened the doorâ€”

â€”and nearly crashed right into Astrid.

With a startled cry, he staggered back and supported himself against the doorframe. Astrid, however, didn't so much as flinch and simply stepped back, folded her arms over her chest, and raised a perturbedly disapproving eyebrow at him.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Ignoring the pain in his back, Hiccup drew himself up and pushed a hand through his hair. "Oh, you know, just taking a short walk to stretch the legs. And then right back to bed."

She shifted her weight onto her other hip. "You know you're not supposed to be walking around yet."

"Come on, I'm fine. And it's just a quick walkâ€”"

A stern finger was jabbed toward the house's interior. "Bed. Now."

With an eye roll and a loud, dramatic huff, Hiccup turned and slunk back to the bed that still sat by the fireplace. But before he sat down, he looked longingly at the blonde Viking over his shoulder. "Please, Astrid? Think about if you were cooped up in here for days. Have mercy."

There was not even a flicker of pity in her cold blue eyes. "Not gonna work on me, Hiccup. Now sit down. I came to change your bandages."

He deflated as it became clear that he was definitely not going to get to fly today and plunked miserably onto his bed with a groan.

Astrid situated herself behind him and helped to pull off his shirt before beginning to unwrap the bandages with quick hands. "You're lucky I'm not going to tell your father about this."

Hiccup gave no reply besides turning his head further away.

"Don't be like that," she snapped. "I don't want you hurting yourself again when you're just starting to heal. I'm only looking out for you."

"Mhm."

He could feel her tense up and instinctively braced himself for a punch, but none ever came. Seemed like he got a break from being beaten up while he was injured. At least one good thing came of this scenario.

"Why don't you take this opportunity to try listening to me for a change," she said, irritatingly smug. "Might do you some good."

"It would do me more good to get out of this Thor-forsaken house."

"You're such an idiot, Hiccup."

A small smile cracked across his face. "Can you really blame me?"

He heard the grin in her voice when she replied with an exasperated sigh and said, "No, I guess not."

The two lapsed into a comfortable silence after that as Astrid applied the healer's salve. She'd taken up tending to his injuries once the healer deemed them well enough, and Hiccup couldn't adequately express his gratefulness for that.

After a few quiet minutes had passed, Astrid spoke up. "Oh, I meant to tell you. Fishlegs went down to get a good look at that Nightmare a few days ago and said there are signs of abuse on it. Apparently it's had a bad run-in with people before, which could explain why it's so temperamental."

"That would make sense." His lips twisted in thought. A dragon that knew nothing but pain from humans was more dangerous than any wild one. That was common knowledge. "I didn't notice any damage on it, though."

Astrid's hands smoothed over his back. "That's probably because you were too busy trying not to get killed. And you still almost managed that."

"I guess." He made a mental note to go down and study the dragon

himself before its fate was decided.

Another silence stretched between them while Astrid finished with his wounds. She was preparing to wrap them with clean bandages when he felt her hesitate, hand hovering over the lacerations. The ghost of her fingertips traced the sutures that bound them with an uncharacteristic gentleness. "You know, these are gonna leave some pretty impressive scars."

"Well, at least I'll have something to show for all this. As I remember someone saying once, it's only fun if you get a scar out of it." He twisted stiffly to toss her a crooked grin.

She sighed as her arms worked to wrap the bandages around his torso. "Yeah, well, this is one instance I would rather not have to be reminded of."

"Aw, c'mon." After the bandage was tied off, Hiccup pushed himself off the bed, snatched up his shirt, and darted toward the door. Before slipping out, he turned to the blonde Viking and smirked. "I'm a dragon trainer. It's an occupational hazard."

And with that, the boy was gone. Astrid raced out after him, but a dark shape zipping across the purple evening sky told her she was too late. She shook her head at the rapidly receding silhouette, but was surprisingly devoid of any irritation. She'd been expecting this, after all, because it was Hiccup, and something of the sort was bound to happen eventually.

And in a way, he was right.

So she would leave him be, for now. But he would most certainly return to an angry lecture.

"You are going to be the death of me, Hiccup Haddock."

* * *

><p>THE END

Oh my gosh, I just finished my first multi-chapter fic. You guys should be proud of me **even though it's not even 10k and was originally intended to be a one-shot****. The ending's rushed, but I just didn't feel like playing with it any more. It took me so long to get this chapter up because...well...let's just say there is a certain scene in it that I had a ****_REALLY_**** hard time writing after HTTYD 2. But I managed somehow.**

**Also, there's a very subtle reference to a particular HTTYD 2 character when Hiccup and Astrid are talking about what happened to the Nightmare. So if that particular character came to mind while reading it, you are correct. **

**Thanks for reading! I hope you enjoyed it! **

End
file.